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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000584

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: GOT POSITIVELY INCLINED TO US REQUEST FOR  
IRAQI REFUGEE PROCESSING, DESPITE SOME INITIAL HESITATION

11. SUMMARY: Turkish government officials are likely to make a positive decision in response to the USG request to resettle Iraqi refugees currently located in Turkey. They expressed some initial hesitation, primarily because they fear an increased influx of refugees from Iraq and elsewhere in the region. We dispelled many of their misconceptions about the USG program and will work closely with the GOT in the weeks ahead to help facilitate a quick and favorable formal decision. END SUMMARY.

12. On March 2, 2007, a U.S. delegation headed by Terry Rusch, Director of Refugee Admissions for PRM, met with officials at the Turkish Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior. Rusch sought Turkish cooperation with U.S. plans to resettle Iraqi refugees from Turkey to the U.S. in 2007. UNHCR expects to refer up to 7,000 Iraqi refugees from the region for resettlement in the U.S. during the first six to nine months of 2007. We expect about 1,800 of these to come from Turkey. However, Turkish authorities tell us that fewer than 800 Iraqi refugees are registered in Turkey right now. They are concerned that higher estimates cast doubt on Turkish border security and they believe increased international aid to refugees in Turkey could attract a new influx of people for whom Turkey is unprepared to provide asylum or assistance. Rusch helped mitigate Turkish concerns by explaining that the U.S. resettlement program focuses exclusively on refugees already present here and in other of Iraq's neighbor countries. She also noted that we will simultaneously resettle an even larger number of Iraqi refugees from Syria and Jordan.

13. PRM/A Director Rusch, Regional Refugee Coordinator Doetsch, and Ankara Consul General made office calls at the MFA and Ministry of Interior on March 2. The aim was to provide additional details about the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and to gain Turkish government cooperation in allowing the departure of USRAP-approved Iraqi refugees who may not yet have registered with Turkish authorities. Under current policy, Turkish authorities do not permit asylum seekers to depart the country if they have not registered properly at their port of entry. Since formal registration means that asylum seekers cannot live in Istanbul or Ankara and cannot work, many avoid registering. Additionally, some asylum seekers who have tried to register in the "satellite cities" where they are allowed to live have encountered delays and backlog at local institutions.

14. MFA Head of Asylum and Migration Ulueren and Interior Ministry Head of Foreigners' Police Terzioglu both took a tough stance during the meetings. Ulueren initially pointed out that the part of Iraq that borders Turkey - the northern, Kurdish controlled provinces of Dohuk and Erbil - is relatively stable, and he was skeptical that Arab Iraqi

refugees are entering Turkey across this border. He also said that Turkey is under a heavy burden as a transit country already, and worried that the U.S. resettlement program would bring more Iraqi refugees to Turkey. Terzioglu expressed concern at what he described as UNHCR's "inflated" estimates of the number of Iraqi refugees already in Turkey and suggested that a Turkey-based U.S. resettlement program would attract yet more refugees to cross the border illegally.

¶5. Rusch reassured both Ulueren and Terzioglu that we have no plans to bring in additional Iraqi refugees, noting that this effort is aimed at refugees already in-country. Simultaneous with the Turkey-based program, the U.S. will resettle much larger numbers of Iraqi refugees from Syria, Jordan, and other countries in the region. She emphasized that the U.S. already resettles an average of 1,100 refugees out of Turkey each year (mostly Iranian Ba'hais) and our existing resettlement infrastructure through the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) in Istanbul makes Turkey a logical place to start resettling Iraqi refugees. In total, resettlement of Iraqis, as currently envisioned, would increase the number of individuals processed through ICMC in Turkey by approximately 1500-2000 in 2007.

¶6. Rusch's interlocutors softened during the course of the meetings. At the end of the MFA meeting, Ulueren asked for written talking points that he will forward for a formal GOT decision. At the Interior Ministry, Terzioglu agreed that the MoI would review on a case-by-case basis those Iraqis in Turkey who have been identified by UNHCR but not registered with Turkish authorities.

¶7. We subsequently provided the following talking points covered by PRM to Ulueren via note verbale:

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BEGIN TEXT OF NOTE VERBALE

-- Each year, the United States welcomes an average of 1,100 refugees from Turkish territory for resettlement in the U.S. Most of these are Iranian Ba'hais while some are from countries in Africa or Asia.

-- In 2007, we expect to resettle several hundred additional Iraqi refugees from Turkish territory. At the same time, we will not reduce the number of refugees from other nationalities whom we resettle from Turkey.

-- Compared to some of Turkey's neighboring countries, the number of Iraqi refugees in Turkey is relatively small. However, because of our established resettlement infrastructure through the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) in Istanbul, it is most logical for us to focus our initial efforts on those refugees present in Turkey.

-- We plan to be able to begin the resettlement process for 300 Iraqi refugees from Turkey to the United States by June ¶2007. These are individuals who have already registered both with UNHCR and with Turkish authorities, and who have been identified by UNHCR and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as particularly vulnerable.

-- We hope to be able to resettle another several hundred to one thousand Iraqi refugees from Turkey to the United States before the end of the year.

-- Throughout this program, we will resettle only persons who are already present on Turkish territory, and we will cooperate closely with Turkish authorities to resolve any issues of their legal status. We have no plans to move any person or persons across any international borders for the purpose of their resettlement from Turkey to the United States.

-- During 2007 we will also begin resettling thousands of

vulnerable Iraqi refugees who are currently residing in other countries in the region. We will resettle them directly from the countries where they are currently residing. Meanwhile, we will provide uniform humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees of all ethnicities in all countries in the region where they are residing.

END TEXT.

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